INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT
Fiscal Year 2004

On June 17, 2004 the IT Department launched Version 2.0 of the Town's website. The project began in late 2003 by translating citizen and staff requests, industry trends, and deficiencies of Version 1.0 into a comprehensive wish list for Version 2.0. Items on the list were individually analyzed with desire and feasibility in mind, and a shortened list of goals was produced. The list of goals included a completely redesigned homepage – portal, multiple easy-to-use methods of finding information and services, and a professional look and feel carried throughout all sections of the site. Future versions of the site will offer more information, online transactions, and interactive GIS.

As the technology needs within the Town expand, the importance of technology consolidation becomes apparent. The Town currently employs over forty software packages requiring server database software, and this number will continue to grow. This year, the IT Department migrated the last software package, Accela Advantage, requiring Oracle database server software, to Microsoft SQL. This will reduce our software relicensing costs in FY 05 as well as reduce by one the number of server database software brands that IT staff needs to support and maintain. The IT Department will continue to consolidate technologies wherever possible.

Recently the cost of wireless technologies has decreased while wireless reliability and speed has continued to increase. Police officers rely on wireless notebooks within vehicles to communicate to Dispatch and query Town and State databases. This year the IT Department utilized a police technology grant to deploy ultra-portable wireless handheld computers to officers on foot and bike patrol with similar capabilities. The IT Department also deployed its first internal wireless base station in Town Hall, providing Town staff wireless access to software packages and files during meetings. The IT Department plans to extend the Town's wireless infrastructure to all Town buildings, making for dynamic office spaces and more efficient meetings.

Over the past two years, the amount of SPAM or Junk email has doubled, and experts say that over sixty percent of internet traffic is now SPAM. IT departments everywhere are struggling to reduce SPAM. The issue is not only system-resource intensive and time consuming for recipients; often the messages contain viruses and offensive material. This year, after much planning, the IT Department migrated its email servers to Microsoft's latest message and collaboration product, Exchange 2003. This product has an Intelligent Mail Filter and has reduced the amount of SPAM within the organization by 95%.

Most departments within the Town rely on computers and technology in order to operate. Over the past few years the responsibilities of the IT Department have more than tripled, making the need to continually improve operations and proficiency within the IT Department vital. This year the IT Department deployed an automated system that monitors in detail all aspects of the technology infrastructure. This network-monitoring system instantly notifies IT staff of small and large failures and allows us to resolve issues often before users experience results of the failure. Future versions of this system will monitor logs and make pre-emptive recommendations to IT staff.

As more and more electronic systems have been added, the IT Department has been mindful of the increase in energy consumption required. To deal with this, the Department took several steps towards minimizing energy consumption, including configuring Windows 2000 and

Windows XP desktops and laptops to automatically power off monitors during inactivity, purchasing flat panel monitors, and purchasing only EPA Energy Star-compliant devices. The Department attempts to set an example in making choices and implementing equipment and systems that are environmentally aware.

In addition to the many projects completed this year, the IT Department worked diligently behind the scenes maintaining and protecting current systems. With the ever-increasing threat of viruses and hackers, regular upgrades to servers, PCs and network devices become a necessity. The IT Department maintains several layers and types of specialized security hardware and software, lowering the risk of unauthorized network intrusion and viruses. The Department also maintains a variety of backup systems both onsite and offsite, ensuring that even in a disaster the Town's data and systems will be safe.

In the coming year, the IT Department will continue to maintain software and infrastructure standards, extend more information and tools to constituents via the website, provide departments with the necessary technologies to operate efficiently, and leverage new technologies in ways which will serve Amherst residents for years to come.

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